

Greetings

It's a new year. We hope it's better than the last. Here we go!

Meetings and Announcements

UCCE Kern County Office Situation--UCCE is still working!

Yes, the usual: Our office on Mt. Vernon Ave. is currently open to the public. **In accordance with the public health emergency declared by the County of Kern, all visitors are required to wear face coverings in all public places until further notice.** Many of us advisors will be alternately in the office and working from home, and I have answered many questions via email, and new queries come in regularly from Kern residents as well as from those who live much further away. Email is the best way to reach me, my address is jfkarlik@ucanr.edu.

Weekly Zoom Presentation on Gardens and Design Has Resumed: Climate Change Next Topic

In January I continue making weekly Zoom presentations on gardens and landscape design, augmented with a bit of history. These presentations are Thursdays at 4:30 pm, and are mostly based on photos from our past horticultural tours. The next presentation, January 14, will be a change from horticulture to the topic of climate change. In my experience, most people have not seen a structured presentation about the science of climate change, whether it's "real" or not, and if so, possible causes. It will take two or three weeks to discuss this topic. The meeting ID and password remain the same. If you didn't receive, please send me an email, jfkarlik@ucanr.edu, and I'll send you the Zoom connection info.

39th Annual Landscape Management Seminar

At this point we've put on hold our 39th annual landscape management seminar. We want to offer eight hours of PCA credit and allow attendees to meet in person. Right now, we can't do those things. Perhaps we can schedule for later in the spring.

Annual Fruit Tree Pruning Demonstrations

I suppose it's obvious, but due to the current situation and stay-at-home orders we can't offer our annual fruit tree pruning demonstrations this year. Sorry. The trees, like yours, will continue to grow.

A Note About Irrigation

I had hoped to turn off my home irrigation system, but with the continued dry weather and unseasonably warm temperatures, I will keep it running one day per week. In winter, water demand by landscapes falls to its lowest value for the year due to cooler temperatures and less solar radiation.

Winter Pruning of Outdoor Roses—Still Time

In December / early January on the valley floor of Kern County, annual winter pruning will be needed for hybrid teas and grandifloras. The time of pruning can be delayed in mountain areas until the coldest weather has passed, but before bud swell occurs. My December *Greenscene* had an article about this, so I just want to mention a couple of things in this newsletter.

Rose pruning in home gardens and landscapes can be a simple matter requiring relatively little time. As for other woody plants, pruning is used for roses to invigorate the plant and direct its growth, but the amount of pruning depends on rose type and purpose in the landscape.

Broadly speaking, most roses grown outdoors can be divided into two groups. Roses grown for cut flowers include hybrid teas and grandifloras, for example, the classic varieties 'Peace,' 'Oklahoma,' 'Mister Lincoln,' and 'Chrysler Imperial.' The shrub- or landscape-type roses are grown as floriferous shrubs, for example, the varieties 'Pink Simplicity,' 'Knock Out,' and 'Flutterbye.'

For hybrid tea and similar roses, we remove dead, diseased and damaged wood as well as older canes showing poor vigor. Canes severely affected by scale insects can also be removed. The rose plant can be thinned, removing central canes to favor 3-5 canes (or more) growing toward the outside. The length of the remaining canes is affected by the purpose of the plant, whether more for cut roses or more for a screen.

Shrub- or landscape-type roses should be treated as floriferous shrubs, and should not be pruned back to a few short canes as hybrid teas can be. Landscape roses are typically (and should be) only lightly pruned, since they function as colorful shrubs. Upright varieties can be left to 5-8 feet. However, every few years, they may be cut back to about a foot above ground, removing older wood. This is a rejuvenation pruning.

The University of California has three free publications, recently revised and updated, that describe the care of outdoor roses, including insect and disease management. These can be read and downloaded from the UCIPM website, www.ipm.ucanr.edu.

Rule of the Superbowl

As a reminder, spring-germinating weeds, in particular crabgrass, can often be managed with pre-emergent herbicides, but to be effective these materials must be applied before germination has progressed too far.

Crabgrass is one of the most common weeds in turf in the Bakersfield area. Because it is an annual, it grows from seed each year. Therefore, its biology offers an opportunity to suppress it before it becomes established, specifically through the use of a pre-emergent herbicide.

In the Bakersfield area, crabgrass seed begins to germinate around the first week of February. That is well ahead of the time bermudagrass and other warm season grasses emerge from dormancy, so crabgrass can have a month or more without competition from other plants. That also means January is too early to apply fertilizer to bermudagrass turfs.

There are several products on the market that can be used with bermudagrass or tall fescue (be sure to check the label!) that will suppress crabgrass but not injure the underlying turf. However, most of these herbicides have little post-emergent activity; that is, they are not effective against established plants. If applied too late, they will not be effective against crabgrass or other annuals.

By some quirk of fate, the playing of the Superbowl and crabgrass germination occur about the same time in Bakersfield and the southern San Joaquin Valley. So, a handy way to remember when to apply a pre-emergent herbicide is to associate its application with the game. If one does that, the herbicide will not be applied too late. Some things still go one, football one of them.

Wood Ashes for the Garden and Landscape

Wood ashes from fireplaces, fire bowls, or wood-burning stoves may accumulate in winter. There are several potential benefits of adding wood ashes to soil, first in their potassium content. Potassium, or potash, is necessary for the healthy growth of fruits and vegetables. After nitrogen, it is the nutrient used in greatest quantity in plants, and wood ashes contain about 5 to 7 percent potassium. Ashes from hardwoods contain more potassium than those from soft woods. Wood ashes also contain about 1½ percent phosphorus, also a necessary nutrient. To preserve nutrient content, ashes should not be stored where rain will leach out nutrients. Ashes may be spread at a rate of 5 to 10 pounds per 100 square feet of soil followed by incorporation. The minerals contained dissolve easily, so ashes should not be used close to seedlings to prevent fertilizer burn.

However, there are several potential disadvantages of using wood ashes as a fertilizer. Many Kern County soils are already high in potassium, and further additions may not be beneficial. Unlike many soil amendments and fertilizers, ashes are strongly alkaline in reaction. Soils in Kern tend to be too alkaline already, and wood ashes further increase pH. In sum, for larger gardens and landscapes, adding small amounts of wood ashes should not be harmful and is a way of returning plant nutrients to soil.

John Karlik

Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

Disclaimer: Discussion of research findings necessitates using trade names. This does not constitute product endorsement, nor does it suggest products not listed would not be suitable for use. Some research results included involve use of chemicals which are currently registered for use, or may involve use which would be considered out of label. These results are reported but are not a recommendation from the University of California for use. Consult the label and use it as the basis of all recommendations.

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